

These terms are provided for a lay person to have some understanding of common building terms.

Ant cap a shaped metal shield which is placed on top of a pier or stump and below bearers or other supporting timber members to delay, and expose during periodic inspections any movement of termites from soil to timber sections of a building

Backfill soil placed into an excavation after placement of concrete, masonry, pipes, timber or other building material

Bagging method of finishing brickwork with an application of thin mortar slurry to the face, Hessian bag for texture (at times pre-coloured)

Baluster upright infill members between stair or balcony and handrail

Balustrade framework of handrails (banisters) and uprights (balusters) that form protective barriers at open side of staircase or balcony

Bargeboard fascia board, usually timber, fixed to the visible sloping edge of a roof

Barge capping a timber or metal or fibro cap that covers the top of the bargeboard & edge of the roof surface

Batten a small timber member used to fix linings, claddings or roof materials to timber frames.

Bay window a window or group of windows forming a bay or recess in a room and projecting outward from the general line of the external wall

Beam a horizontal, load bearing structural member supported at two or more points

Bearer a sub-floor structural member spanning between piers or walls and supporting the joists

Bottom plate a horizontal member forming the base of a structural wall (generally 100x50 timbers covered by internal linings)

Box gutter a concealed roof gutter used between roofs, behind parapets or in valleys

Brick tie a galvanised or stainless steel wire strip, built into brickwork at regular spacing to link internal and external sections of wall either in veneer or full brick construction

Brick veneer type of construction in which a structural timber frame is tied to single-brick external wall that is non load bearing

Building regulations rules (usually council) that control public health and safety, and the quality and acceptable standards of construction of any building

Bulkhead is a drop boxed section used to conceal underslung services or to box in the likes of a garage roller door, air conditioning ducting etc'.

Bullnose the rounding of a corner into quarter of a circle

Cathedral ceiling a ceiling which follows surface of the roof structure, sometimes with roof timbers left exposed

Caulking waterproof sealing of joints with pliable or flexible compound (eg. silicone, no more gaps)

Ceiling joists a structural member, usually timber, to which the ceiling linings are fitted

Cladding external covering to walls, other than wet applied finish

Clerestory window a window in the upper part of a room to admit light from the above and adjacent roof

Collar tie horizontal structural roof-framing member that ties opposite roof rafters together to prevent roof frame spread or deflection at the centre of the rafters, usually above under purlins

Column free standing vertical structural member, generally rectangular or round, supporting structure above

Common brick type of bricks generally used for walls that will later be cement-rendered or painted (also known as 'comers')

Composites are materials made from two or more constituent materials with significantly different physical or chemical properties, that when combined, produce a material with characteristics different from the individual components.

Compressed fibre cement sheet extra high density sheeting made from cement and fibre, used for water-resistant flooring or wall cladding in wet areas (eg bathrooms)

Concrete is a composite material composed mainly of water, aggregate, sand and cement. Often, additives and reinforcements (such as rebar) are included in the mixture to achieve the desired physical properties of the finished concrete. When ingredients are mixed together, they form a type of fluid mass that is poured into formwork to shape the concrete. Over time, the cement forms a hard matrix which binds the other ingredients together into a durable stone-like material with many uses.

Conduit protective casing for electrical or communication cables, especially for use in exposed situations

Coping capping or covering on top of wall or pier as decoration and to protect masonry from water penetration from above

Cornice ornamental moulding used to conceal the joint between ceiling and wall or column

Corrugated type of sheet, usually corrosion resistant, which is strengthened for the use in construction by being formed into an alternating series of grooves and ridges

Course single row or layer of bricks or masonry

Coving a concave moulding, usually between the interface of wall and ceiling or flooring

Cupping distortion of (usually) wide timber boards showing curvature across the grain, causing the broad surface to be concave

Curing process of improving the quality of concrete by preventing rapid drying out of concrete, by either keeping constantly wet or sealing surface to minimise evaporation

Cut & fill method used to provide level area on sloping site. The uphill part of the slope is cut away and the soil removed is used as fill on the lower slope immediately below

Dado the lower portion of wall above the skirting when finished in contrast to remainder of wall (eg wood panelling)

Dampcourse a continuous layer of impervious material placed in a masonry wall to prevent the upward or downward movement of moisture (commonly referred to as DPC)

Decking material forming the covering for a deck or roof

Deflection the displacement of a loaded structural member or system in any direction, measured from it's no-load position, after loads have been applied

Door furniture metal accessories for a door (eg handles, hinges, latches, locks, bolts, escutcheons etc')

Door jamb the vertical sides of a door frame

Double glazing form of glazing incorporating two panes of glass with air space between them, providing better sound and thermal insulation

Double-hung window a window with two sashes which both slide vertically over one another and are balanced by cords & weights or springs (balancers)

Downpipe a metal, plastic or fibro pipe for conveying rainwater from roof to a stormwater drain, ground level, tank. Or other part of building

Dressed timber usually used for joinery purposes that has passed through a planing machine to produce smooth surfaces

Drip groove a weathering groove or recess on the underside of a sill or head near the outer edge, to prevent the horizontal passage of moisture and to shed any rainwater

Eaves part of the roof that overhangs the exterior walls

Eaves gutter a preformed or specially made open drain, fixed to the fascia board, for collecting and carrying away rainwater from roof to downpipes

Eaves soffit linings sheeting or boarding which is fitted as lining material to underside of eaves

Expansion joint a vertical or horizontal joint in a construction which permits thermal expansion-contraction or creep

Face brick visible high-quality brick, primarily used in brickwork where no render or paint finish is to be applied

Fall the differences in level between two points, or the slope of a flat roof, gutter or drain

Fanlight a sash placed over a door opening

Fascia wide board fixed to the lower end of the roof rafters

Fibreboard cladding or lining formed by compressed fibre into low-, medium – or high density building board

Fibrous plaster gypsum plaster cast in sheets, which is reinforced with sisal or fibreglass fibres

Fittings items such as light fittings that can be removed without causing damage to a property

Flashing a strip or sleeve of impervious material (such as galvanised metal, lead or copper) dressed or fitted to shed water, or to cover a joint to prevent penetration of moisture

Flight an unbroken series of steps from on floor or landing to another

Floor framing structural timbers supporting the flooring or floorboards

Flue the passage provided by vent or chimney structure as an outlet for gases and smoke

Flush joint a joint between two materials where both pieces and the jointing material, if any, that lie on the same plane

Footing the structural base of wall or pier supporting the mass of the building transferring the load to the foundation

Foundation that portion of the ground supporting the mass of the building

Freestanding a building that stands unattached to any other buildings

Gable a vertical wall or panel that forms a triangular portion under the roof surface

Galvanising bonding of zinc protective coating over steel or iron to prevent corrosion (rust)

Glazing 1. Fitting of glass to sashes opening or doors 2. A smooth surface of clay products that have been fired in a manner that seals the surface

Grout mortar, usually fluid, for filling joints or cracks (eg in brickwork, wall or floor tiles, or concrete)

Gutter a preformed or specially made channel or drain for collecting and carrying away rainwater from roof to downpipes

Hanging beam a structural beam supporting ceiling joists

Hardwood timber that has come from trees that have broad leaves and flowers, it is the wood structure that determines if timber is a hardwood or a softwood.

Head the top section of a frame, over an opening

Header brick laid so that the narrower end is visible

Highlight a window above the roof or over another part of a building used to admit light or provide ventilation

Hip roof shape where the sloping surfaces are pitched on all sides of building

Hob brickwork that is raised above floor level, usually around a bath, shower or fireplace

HVAC is an abbreviation of “Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning”
Insulation a thermal or acoustic barrier, commonly made from fibreglass, rock wool, expanded polystyrene or reflective foil

Jamb vertical sides of frames of a window or door opening

Joist a structural timber to which a floor or ceiling is fixed

Kalsomine obsolete decorative paint coat for interior plaster surfaces, prepared from dry powder of whiting (a white chalk) and glue mixed with water

Lagging thermal insulation material for covering pipe or duct work

Laminate product made by bonding together two or more layers of materials

Lining internal coverings to walls or ceiling, usually of framed construction

Lintel a horizontal structural member spanning on opening

Masonry brick, concrete block, stone, terracotta or other structural units laid in mortar

Membrane a thin pliable sheet material, usually impervious

Meter box a prefabricated or custom made box to house and enclose a meter board or electricity meters and often fuses.

Mortar suitably proportioned mixture (paste) of sand (fine aggregate), cement and/or lime or additives and water for the laying of masonry units

Mullion a vertical member dividing a window or door frame into sections

Newel a stair post into which the handrail or banister is housed

Noggin horizontal blocking fitted between studs to hold them straight, and for fixing of linings

Nosing the projecting edge of any flat surface, generally rounded in section (eg the overhanging edge of stair tread or window sill)

Obscure glass usually used for privacy, through which objects cannot be clearly seen

Pane a single piece of glass fitted or cut to size for a window or door ready for glazing

Parapet a low wall that rises above edge of a roof, balcony or terrace

Particle board building board made from compressed fibres bonded together with adhesive, it comes in low, medium or high density grades, some particle board has waterproofing added

Party wall a wall between two adjoining buildings, which often straddles the boundary

Pelmet timber or fabric cover to curtain rod or blind fittings or to sliding door to conceal tracks

Pergola an open timber or steel framework over path, terrace, patio or deck, often covered with plants trained over members

Pier a vertical structural member of footings in concrete, steel or brick

Pier and beam construction a footing system for reactive soils in which the structure has reinforced concrete beams supported on reinforced concrete piers

Plasterboard rigid lining board made of a core of gypsum plaster set between and bonded to outer coverings of heavy duty paper

Plinth a block or slab on which a pedestal, column, hot water unit or statue is placed.

Plywood fabricated wood panels formed by bonding layers together, under heat and pressure, a series of timber veneers at right angles make up layers

Pointing the completion of joints -

- Between ridge or hip or end tiles with matching mortar -
- Between tiles on walls with mortar of matching colour -
- In brickwork or masonry by trowelling or mortar into the joints after the structural units are laid

Purlin a horizontal structural roof member, either supporting the rafters underneath at right angles or, where there are no rafters, supporting the roof covering

Quad moulding with cross-section of quadrant of a circle (quarter round)

Rafter a structural member sloping down from ridge to eaves, and providing the principle structural support of the roofing material

Render finish (eg cement or plaster) that is applied to brick or masonry walls. Can also be applied to a special type of fibreboard called blue board.

Retaining wall a wall built to hold back earth or other solid material, and resist lateral pressure (thrust) from the retained material

Reveal the vertical side of an opening such as window or door

Ridge the horizontal apex of two roof planes, usually the highest point of the roof

Ridge tile concrete or burnt clay tile used for the covering or a ridge or hip of a tiled roof (usually of angular cross section, but sometimes semicircular), fitted together with flanged or overlapping joints

Rise the vertical distance through which an element rises (eg rise of the roof, a stair or step)

Riser the vertical face of a step in a flight of stairs or vertical drainage or plumbing pipe

Rising damp the vertical movement of moisture up masonry, causing unsightly staining and dampness on internal walls

Roof truss a structural frame designed to carry the loads of a roof and its coverings over the full span without intermediate support

Rot fungal decay of timber, caused by fungus under conditions of excessive moisture and absence of adequate ventilation.

Rough-sawn timber direct from the saw – usually used for structural rather than joinery purposes

Sapwood in the living tree the wood containing living cells located between the heartwood (deadwood) and the bark. When the tree is felled this section of the tree still retains differences to the heartwood and is prone to attack by some pests

Sarking a pliable waterproof membrane fixed under roof or wall covering to collect and discharge any water that may penetrate, often combined with reflective foil to give improved thermal insulation

Sash the framed part of a window unit into which the glass is fitted, and which can be moved by pivoting or sliding

Sealant group of non-hardening materials, applied in liquid or plastic form between adjacent building materials to seal joints against the penetration of moisture

Seasoned timber air or kiln dried timber

Setting a trowelled finishing coat of lime putty and/or plaster of paris, applied to cement render or concrete surfaces

Settlement downward movement of the soil of any part of the structure that it supports

Sheet flooring made up of large rigid sheets

Shutter a hinged or moveable cover or screen for a window or other opening, usually fixed externally and sometimes louvered

Sill a horizontal member at the bottom of a window frame

Skillion a roof shape consisting of a single sloping surface without a ridge

Skirting moulding to cover the joint between floor and wall lining

Skylight a glazed opening in a roof and/or ceiling, designed to admit daylight to the space below

Slab on ground a floor system of reinforced concrete with thickened edges placed directly on the ground over a vapour proof membrane

Sleeper pier a freestanding pier, usually of masonry, supporting floor framing

Soffit the underside of eaves or the visible underside of a beam, lintel, arch, reveal, vault or suspended concrete slab

Soffit lining sheeting or boarding fitted as lining material in lined eaves or soffits

Softwoods non pored timbers, timbers from trees that grow pine cones and needles. The term does not refer to the hardness of the timber.

Span the horizontal distance between points of support for load bearing structural members

Stability the resistance of structure to sliding, overturning or collapse

Stress grade visual or mechanical strength grading of timber

Stringer in stair construction, the inclined structural member on both sides of the stair treads and risers

Strip footing poured in a continuous strip (eg under the length of the wall)

Strut structural support to a purlin that transfers load to the wall frame or strutting beam

Strutting beam a structural beam used to support struts where no internal walls are available, loads are transferred to other walls

Stud a vertical structural member in the wall framing to which lining or cladding can be fixed

Sub-floor vent a brick with openings or a brick with steel mesh to provide cross flow ventilation to the sub-floor void.

Termites insects that have species that can cause significant damage to timbers in service

Termite shield (barrier) termite shields are commonly known as ant capping, ant capping is intended to expose termite workings during periodic inspections of the sub-floor areas

Termiticides chemicals used to control termites.

Timber framed construction in which the structural member are of timber or depend on a timber frame for support

Tongue and groove a strong jointing system for timber boards where on one side is grooved to allow insertion of tongue from adjacent board

Top plate a horizontal structural member forming the top side of wall framing, or laid on and strapped to a masonry wall, which carries the ceiling joists and supports rafters

Transom the horizontal member of a window frame, door frame, or opening between head and sill

Tread the horizontal portion or length of each strip in a stairway

Trench mesh steel mesh in lounge narrow lengths for the reinforcement of concrete strip footings

Trim mouldings to doors, windows, joinery or openings

Trimmer a timber cross member inserted around an opening in timber framing (eg around access holes, skylights, chimneys)

Truss a frame designed to carry loads over a full span without intermediate support

Underpurlin a horizontal structural roof member supporting the underside of rafter at right angles

Valley the intersection of two sloping roof surfaces to form an open drain or gutter

Valley board boarding that forms a base or support for the valley gutter, commonly called a valley metal

Verge capping the timber or metal cap between the top of the barge board and the roof surfaces

Verge tile full or half roof tile in any course, fixed parallel to and projecting over or flush with, the verge of a gable roof. Commonly referred to as an end tile.

Vermin proofing wire mesh fixed to the bottom plate and set into mortar joint in brick veneer buildings to prevent the entry of vermin (rats, possums etc') into the wall cavity

Wall tie galvanised or stainless steel wire built into cavity walls to bind the inner and outer leaves or to attach a single masonry leaf to the timber frame in brick veneer construction

Warp the general term for distortion of timber due to variations in moisture content

Water table the natural and variable level of groundwater in soil, usually referring to the upper level of the soil wholly saturated with groundwater

Weatherboard types of boards designed to function as an effective exterior wall cladding to timber framed buildings

Weathering gradual deterioration of timber or materials exposed to natural elements

Weather strip 1. A strip of galvanised steel or plastic built into the horizontal joints of external fibre cement cladding to render them watertight 2. A brass strip set into a threshold to resist the penetration of rain

Weep hole a hole or opening placed in the perpendicular joints of a masonry wall above the level of a flashing or at the bottom of a cavity to permit the drainage of any accumulated moisture within the cavity